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Pauperism, Charities, and Relief Measures

NEW BOOKS

DEACON, J. B. *Disasters. And the American Red Cross in disaster relief.* Social work series. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation. 1918. Pp. 230. 75c.)

Contains chapters on disasters at sea; coal mine disasters; floods; fires; tornadoes; and principles of disaster relief.

HURRY, J. B. *Poverty and its vicious circles.* (London: Churchill; Philadelphia: P. Blakiston's Son & Co. 1917. Pp. 180. \$2.)

Annual report of the Social Service Commission, July 1, 1916-July 1, 1917. (Los Angeles: The Commission. 1917. Pp. 61.)

Humanizing the greater city's charity. The work of the Department of Public Charities of the City of New York. (New York: Public Welfare Committee. 1917. Pp. 144.)

Financial federations. The report of a special committee. (New York: American Association for Organizing Charity. 1917. Pp. 285. \$1.)

Socialism and Co-operative Enterprises

Municipal Ownership. By CARL D. THOMPSON. (New York: B. W. Huebsch. 1917. Pp. xi, 114. \$1.00.)

This volume presents in simple, popular, and extreme form the stock arguments for public ownership, while completely ignoring all arguments, considerations, or facts, tending to discredit it.

The first chapter, on The Extent and Growth of Municipal Ownership, is perhaps the best, assembling as it does in brief compass the most recent facts available regarding the extent of municipal ownership in the United States, Canada, England, and Germany. As the result of this survey, the author concludes: "It [municipal ownership] has been put to the test of practical experience throughout the world and for a period of a half century, in every conceivable form and under every possible condition. It has stood the test, has won its way, and is more widespread and prevalent today than ever. The weight of the world's experience with ever-increasing emphasis has gone over to the side of municipal ownership." This conclusion seems too broad and sweeping, in view of the abandoned experiments in municipal ownership.

The chapter on The Case against Private Ownership contends that private ownership inevitably produces excessive rates, poor service, bad labor conditions, over-capitalization, enormous private profits, concentration of wealth, and corruption in politics. This

chapter would be far more convincing if it had been published before the era of state regulation. But many of the arguments lose their force now. Indeed, many of the evils described are the very ones which effective regulation seeks to prevent. Many of the statistics quoted, for example those comparing the rates charged by public and private plants, date back to the period prior to state regulation. A more fair comparison would be the rates now charged by municipally owned plants with those now charged by private plants, under similar operating conditions but under efficient regulation; or a comparison of the costs of operation (including interest) of public and private plants, if the purpose is to throw light upon operating efficiency.

The chapter on The Failure of Regulation minimizes the results achieved by regulatory bodies in the United States. The chief criticism seems to be that these boards and commissions, in some cases, have permitted advances in rates, and that regulation has effectively blocked municipal ownership. Every careful student of the question must admit the disappointments of regulation, and the failure of many regulatory bodies to measure up to their opportunities. But it cannot be doubted that, upon the whole, much has been achieved by these bodies. The author completely fails to make a fair appraisal of the results accomplished by these agencies.

Great emphasis is placed, throughout, upon the advantages which will accrue to labor from the policy of municipalization, in the form of better wages and hours. Indeed, it is apparent that the volume is intended to make a special appeal to the wage-earning class. The following statement speaks for itself: "In their official organ, *The Electrical Worker* . . . they . . . [the electrical workers] show that municipal ownership could be made to yield \$2300 per employee a year, in higher wages and better conditions" (p. 104).

The final count against private ownership is the alleged fact that it constitutes everywhere an evil influence in politics, but the possibilities of the misuse of political power under municipal ownership are completely ignored.

The municipal ownership advocate seeking arguments to justify his position may find this volume of some assistance, but the open-minded student seeking the truth regarding the merits of public and private ownership will find it of little value.

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